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ABSTRACT

This booklet was written to describe and evaluate the role of magnet schools in desegregation plans. The author presents case studies of two moderately successful magnet schools, the Martin Luther King Middle School in Boston and the Clifton Multi-Age Magnet School in Cincinnati. He then discusses magnet schools in the context of desegregation and illustrates the way in which the courts have been using magnet schools for desegregation purposes. In the third section the author discusses the educational dimension of magnet schools, somewhat apart from their desegregation impact. The author then reviews the roles of State and Federal governments in supporting magnet education. The booklet is concluded with a discussion of the pros and cons of metropolitan magnet schools and recommendations for magnet school programs. (Author/MK)

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Magnet Schools: An Approach to Voluntary Desegregation

Charles B. McMillan

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Magnet Schools: An Approach to Voluntary Desegregation

By Charles B. McMillan

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Introduction

In scores of American cities over the past two decades, federal and state courts have mandated a variety of legal and educational remedies to end racial segregation in the public schools. In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown* v. *Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional, and the Court mandated school systems to put an end to segregative practices. Very few school systems, however, have done so voluntarily. From 1954 to the late 1960s a series of court orders, primarily in the South, mandated the end of de jure segregation, that is, segregation of black and white children required by law. These court decisions were quite explicit: Eliminate the dual school system and open all schools to everyone without regard to race.

By the early 1970s the major court battles in the South had been won and the desegregation battleground switched to the great urban centers of the North and West. Here the patterns of segregation were far more subtle and often involved complex feeder patterns (for example, kindergarten through fifth-grade schools in minority neighborhoods leading to poor quality sixth- through eighth-grade middle schools and kindergarten through sixth-grade schools in white neighborhoods leading to high quality seventh- through ninth-grade junior highs); redistricting (i.e., gerrymandering district boundaries to insure almost all-white or all-black enrollments); or one-way transfer policies (for example, building a new school in a racially mixed neighborhood and then allowing white families to transfer to distant all-white schools). Correcting each separate violation came to be seen as impractical and ineffec-

tive. The Court set the stage for Northern school desegregation in 1971 in *Swann* v. *Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, one of the last of the Southern school cases, when it ruled that whenever segregation is found, "all vestiges" of it must be eliminated, "root and branch." This ruling was the foundation for massive systemwide busing of minority and white children in numerous Northern and Western cities in the 1970s. First in San Francisco, then in Denver, then in Minneapolis, federal courts have used the *Swann* decision to bring about systemwide school desegregation. The courts' decisions were intended to equalize the racial balance in schools; this was considered a sufficient judicial remedy to the complaints of segregation.

The Minneapolis case, however, marked a kind of turning point. In the late 1960s the Minneapolis school system was sued by a coalition of minority organizations and charged with deliberate segregative actions that had the effect of keeping the races separated. In 1972 the court ruled against the Minneapolis schools. The specifics of the case are not critical in an introduction to magnet schools. What is important is the argument presented by the Minneapolis school board that, as part of its plan to remedy the segregation, it should be allowed to continue with certain *voluntary* educational programs that it had begun several years earlier. Four alternative elementary schools had been established in the late 1960s to attempt to meet the demand for educational diversity: a "free" school, an "open" school, a "structured" school, and a "fundamental" school. Since these schools had been attracting racially mixed student bodies, and since enrollment in any of these schools was wholly voluntary, why not simply let them continue as is? The school authorities assured the court that student enrollments by race would be carefully monitored. The court endorsed the plan, and the first court-sanctioned magnet schools were born.

What are magnet schools? The federal courts have defined magnet schools as those having a "distinctive program of study" that will attract a voluntary cross section of students from all racial groups. Federal regulations define magnet schools as those with a "special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds." Educators have defined them as schools offering a "variety of educational offerings" that will result in voluntary in-

tegration of the students enrolled. In all these definitions four criteria stand out:

1. Magnet schools must offer an educational program that is *different, special, distinctive,* or otherwise distinguishable from the regular curriculum in nonmagnet schools.

2. The special curriculum must be *attractive to students of all races,* not just whites or blacks or Hispanics or other minority groups.

3. Magnet schools must be *racially mixed* and must have the effect of eliminating segregation of the races among the students.

4. Magnet schools should be *open to students of all races on a voluntary basis,* and any admission criteria that are imposed must not have the effect of discriminating on the basis of race.

Each of these criteria is critical and will be discussed in the sections that follow.

The decision of the federal court in Minneapolis, upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, opened the door for an entirely new set of judicial responses to school desegregation. In the 1973 Denver desegregation case the Court allowed the school system to implement a still wider variety of plans, including magnet schools, to achieve desegregation.

The federal court in the 1975 Boston desegregation order set the standard for the remainder of the 1970s by establishing an entire magnet district of 22 schools enrolling nearly a quarter of the total school population. The court ordered the establishment of schools with special programs emphasizing language arts, performing arts, multicultural studies, and other specialty areas, and student attendance was to be entirely voluntary. Twenty-five percent of the students were to be drawn from the immediate neighborhood and 75% from all other sections of the city.

Since the Boston decision, magnet schools and programs have been considered and adopted to some degree in dozens of communities. Many were developed under court order, including those in Los Angeles, Houston, Louisville, Dallas, Milwaukee, and San Diego. Many others resulted from a threatened court order, including those in Cincinnati, Bridgeport (Conn.), Seattle, and Chicago. A few, like those in Montclair (N.J.), St. Paul, and Cambridge (Mass.), were entirely voluntary. Magnet schools are found in virtually every state in the

nation today, and their number is likely to increase throughout the 1980s.

Why Magnet Schools?

What lies behind the development of magnet schools and why are they important for the 1980s?

First, in the view of some authorities, magnet schools are an answer to "forced busing," symbolized by the ugly white resistance to desegregation at South Boston High School in 1974-75. If schools are special and attractive, the theory holds, students of different races will choose voluntarily to integrate the schools.

Second, courts of law since the Minneapolis decision have been searching for solutions to school segregation that are less likely to cause civil strife, stoning of school buses, injury to children, and mob violence. Put another way, courts are looking for ways to soften white resistance to school desegregation plans, especially where white students are asked or required to attend school in minority neighborhoods. Legal purists would no doubt dispute this interpretation. The law is the law, they would argue, regardless of public opinion. But law is clearly the expression and embodiment of social values and public sentiment, and in the long run these factors do influence the direction the law takes.

Third, the growth of magnet schools dovetails with the movement of the late 1960s to design alternative schools to serve different learning styles and interests. Mario Fantini, a leading advocate of alternative schools, has identified baseline standards for alternative schools: They must offer 1) student choice, 2) different though not necessarily better options, 3) a comprehensive set of educational objectives, and 4) equal access for all students, all without 5) the necessity for large amounts of extra money. These are precisely the standards underlying magnet schools. Add a proviso that schools must be racially mixed at specified percentages and you have a neat definition of magnet education.

The alternative school movement has heavily influenced magnet school development. Many of the special programs being offered now as magnet programs were field tested in alternative schools. For example, free schools, open schools, creative arts schools, discovery

schools, fundamental schools, experiential learning schools, schools with minicourses, and learning centers are all types of alternative schools that have frequently served as the attractive and distinctive aspects of magnet schools. Programs emphasizing talented and gifted students, multicultural learning, and bilingual education are also currently popular.

In the sections that follow, I shall first present two case studies of magnet schools, both moderately successful but different in several respects. Then I shall discuss magnet schools in the context of desegregation and illustrate the way in which courts have been using magnet schools. Next is a discussion of the educational dimension of magnet schools somewhat apart from their desegregation impact. Then I shall review the roles of state and federal governments in supporting magnet education, discuss the pros and cons of metropolitan magnet schools, and conclude with some recommendations.

Two Case Studies of Magnet Schools

The two magnet schools described below illustrate different dimensions of the magnet experience.

Case 1: The Martin Luther King Middle School

The Martin Luther King Middle School in Boston stands near the crest of a hill in the heart of the black and Hispanic Roxbury/North Dorchester section of the city. Built by the Works Progress Administration in the Roosevelt years, the school serves a maximum of 850 students, who in 1974 were all black or Hispanic. The outside stairway leading to the locked front doors hasn't been used for years; instead, the entrance is into the basement on the side of the building, near the cafeteria. The door there reminds one of a fortress: The lock has been torn away countless times, and successive layers of heavy metal conceal the years of violence. From the inside, a 4x4 beam fits into an iron bracket to keep out intruders.

In the decade preceding the 1974 court order in Boston, the King School exemplified most of what was wrong with the Boston school system. As the neighborhood changed from Irish and Jewish to black and Hispanic, white students were allowed to transfer to distant all-white schools. The King School was transformed into a sixth- through eighth-grade middle school in order to prepare students to move to predominantly black ninth- through twelfth-grade high schools. (The comparable "white" schools were organized as seventh- through ninth-grade and tenth- through twelfth-grade.) A predominantly white faculty was increasingly unable to respond to parent demands for

educational improvements. Vandalism, violence, declining test scores, and teacher absenteeism were all on the increase in 1974.

During the first year of court-ordered desegregation (1974-75), the King School district was redrawn to include a racial mix. But many of the whites either stayed home, transferred to the suburbs, or "beat the system" in some other way. The enrollment was still more than 85% minority, but the staff felt that the 1974-75 year was an improvement over previous years.

In 1975, for reasons that we can only speculate on, Judge W. Arthur Garrity designated the King School as a magnet school with a language arts theme. Kimbrough Marshall, a member of the King staff at the time, recalls:

> The staff was appalled that they had not been consulted, much less involved, in the process of becoming a magnet, and were afraid they had nothing uniquely magnetic to offer; they were well aware that many parents around the city still remembered the school's history of racial violence in the 1960s and feared the neighborhood around it. (Marshall)

When the parent request forms came back in June 1975, 298 parents had designated King as their first, second, or third choice. This left 552 seats empty. Because racial enrollments were fixed, the court refused to allow local black or Hispanic children to fill these seats.

The disappointing anticipated enrollment raised the disheartening possibility that the school might be closed and large numbers of faculty might be transferred or dismissed. The issue was no longer educational excellence or magnetism but survival. Working frantically over the next 10 weeks, a small group of teachers who dubbed themselves the "August Planning Group" accomplished a small educational and marketing miracle. They hand-addressed notes to 1,200 white families, prepared and distributed statements listing the strengths of the school (with stamped return postcards), phoned, knocked on doors, and accompanied parents to the downtown transfer office. The group worked seven days a week at all hours. On opening day, 150 new white students had signed on, allowing an additional 150 black neighborhood children to enroll; total enrollment was now over 600 and the future of school and staff was secure.

The 1975-76 school year was not without problems and challenges—scheduling, curriculum revision, staff training for teaching racially heterogeneous classes, raising extra funds, and identifying a college pairing. All required extra work.

The challenge of building a magnet school around a language arts theme was considered irrelevant in most classrooms. Teachers taught the regular curriculum as best they could. Their needs were basic: finding materials, providing individualized instruction, and maintaining order in their rooms.

In 1976-77 recruitment of additional students and a favorable interpretation of the court's enrollment quota resulted in a student enrollment approaching 700, though mention of the magnet theme was eliminated from recruiting materials.

In succeeding years, the enrollment stabilized at near school capacity, and the King School now ranks as one of the finest middle schools in the city. A parent-prepared handbook on all Boston's magnet schools says:

> So much is to be seen at the King. So many fantastic programs are offered. I can only invite you to see for yourself. (*C.W.E.C. Report*, Spring 1979)

The language arts theme has been reintroduced into recruiting materials and now is generally considered to mean greater stress on reading and writing, including extracurricular activities such as a student newspaper and a literary magazine. Whether this theme makes King different from other middle schools is not much of an issue in Boston. The school is a good school; it provides a safe and secure environment; and its success has contributed to the improvement of education in Boston.

You may ask how a troubled "ghetto" school in an all-minority neighborhood in 1974 could become, in 1979-80, an excellent school so attractive that more than 300 white students voluntarily enrolled. These numbers suggest a magnet school at its best. Generally, there are three reasons for the success of the King Magnet School:

1. The dedication and commitment of the faculty and administration has been outstanding; good faculties make good schools.
2. The King's court-given magnet theme, language arts, was recast

in terms attractive to working-class parents: the basics, discipline, grading, homework—no fancy stuff.

3. The options for parents in Boston are limited; if a magnet school is not chosen, the student is assigned to an unknown school. Choice in that context, in and of itself, becomes important.

These three factors represent fundamental aspects of the magnet education story, and they will reappear frequently in the following discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of magnet schools.

Case 2: The Clifton Multi-Age Magnet School

The Clifton Multi-Age Magnet School in Cincinnati, Ohio, also began in September 1975, but the impetus for its creation came from a wary school administration, not from a federal court. The Cincinnati Public Schools had already been involved in a court fight with the local chapter of NAACP between 1963 and 1969, and the federal court had ruled in favor of the school system. The victory was shortlived, however, and in 1974 the same plaintiffs filed suit again, charging that the system was racially segregated in violation of the U.S. Constitution. The notion of magnet schools serving as a voluntary hedge against what could turn out to be a massive citywide busing order was raised in the early 1970s by then Superintendent of Schools Donald Waldrip. After extensive planning designed primarily to find out what sorts of options would attract parents to select schools not in their neighborhood, a variety of educational alternatives was proposed. The Clifton School, located in an affluent white area, was selected to be a multi-age, nongraded magnet, with a primary unit for ages 6, 7, and 8 (grades 1, 2, and 3) and an intermediate unit for ages 9, 10, and 11 (grades 4, 5, and 6). Although the major education goal would continue to emphasize student proficiency in reading, writing, and math, the introduction of nongraded classrooms was new to Cincinnati.

The Clifton School was old, built around the turn of the century. It took a full year of renovation to create the open learning spaces needed for the new teaching and learning format. Nevertheless, in 1975 the reputation of the school was good and the school had a partially integrated student body because of a slow influx of black families into the periphery of the neighborhood. Further, the central administration, in

collaboration with teacher union leadership, arranged for the transfer of teachers on the basis of expressed interest. The faculty of Clifton consisted of both old and newly transferred teachers, but all of them professed a strong commitment to multi-age grouping. Some additional staff training was provided, but it was not a serious need.

In short, the Clifton Multi-Age Magnet School in 1975 had everything going for it. Two questions remained: Would black and other minority students opt for the magnet program in numbers substantial enough both to balance the school and reduce minority concentrations in other schools? And would parents of white neighborhood children opt for other citywide magnets, thereby freeing up places at Clifton for minority students? The enrollments in 1975-76 and 1976-77, self-selected on a voluntary basis, were positive on both counts. White neighborhood students did attend other magnets, and black and other minority students did enroll in significant numbers. By fall 1977 the enrollment had tipped slightly in favor of minority students. Of the 630 students at Clifton in 1977-78, 330 were black, 274 were white, and 26 were members of other races.

With diligent recruiting of both black and white students in the next years, the school in 1979-80 remains about 46% white and 54% black and other minority. About 45% of the students are from outside the neighborhood, and most of these are black. The remaining 55% are from the neighborhood and are mostly white.

The school is widely regarded in Cincinnati as an excellent school. Basic skills scores have remained high. Faculty morale is high and the principal, Dennis McNeil, speaks of the school as a "good family unit." Evaluations by both black and white parents in recent years have been very favorable, and the dropout rate has been low. A very active parent council publishes a bimonthly newsletter, and a volunteer school "foundation" has been successful in raising money from many sources to support special school activities. The range of special projects is not dissimilar from those in most good elementary schools—creative writing competitions, musical performances, basic career awareness activities, outdoor education, and special resource centers.

It is not clear from the school-initiated evaluations just how important a factor the magnet theme has been in attracting parents. Most of

the data from parents refers to such features as safety, security, reading, math, good teachers, and good facilities, and not to the magnet theme of multi-age grouping. To rank the factors that make this school attractive to parents and students would be very difficult, probably unreliable, and in this case pointless. The facts are that the school is distinctive, draws students citywide on a voluntary basis, is racially balanced, and inspires students to learn. Viewed in isolation, and without considering its impact on the total desegregation effort in Cincinnati, the school has all the benchmarks of a successful magnet school. Whether it will continue as a magnet school, however, will very likely depend on the outcome of the 1974 desegregation suit, *Bronson* v. *Board of Education of Cincinnati*, which as of this writing has still not been resolved.

Magnet Schools: A Desegregation Perspective

Magnet schools have almost always been used to avoid or somehow deflect court-ordered desegregation efforts. There are exceptions; some magnet schools have been developed because of a sincere desire by school officials to integrate the schools and enrich the educational options for all children, but they are few and far between. In the main, the magnet school movement has emerged as a direct and sometimes creative response to court-ordered desegregation.

In the early 1970s, magnet schools were viewed mainly as a desegregation dodge. In a review of desegregation remedies, Gordon Foster argued:

> One of the most spurious desegregation techniques is the "magnet school" idea. . . . The magnet concept is a message to the white community which says in effect: "This is a school that has been made so attractive educationally [magnetized] you will want to enroll your child voluntarily in spite of the fact that he will have to go to school with blacks." (Foster, p. 24)

The author was arguing from a legal context and was speaking from the point of view of the minority community: Since it is black parents and students who have been wronged, the solution should not cater to white parents and students. He also implicitly suggests the notion of punishment: Whites should not be coddled to persuade them to go to school with blacks, they should be forced. Such a notion has characterized school desegregation remedies since 1954 and, until recent years, has tended to limit the use of magnet schools as a desegregation remedy.

Other legal opinions have limited the use of magnet schools as a solution to segregation. In a series of desegregation opinions in the late 1960s and early 1970s, courts prescribed more stringent standards for desegregation: It must be swift; it must be complete; and it must have the effect of eliminating all vestiges of segregative acts. Courts and enforcement agencies have refused to accept magnet schools where these conditions are not met. In Wilmington, Delaware, for example, a metropolitan desegregation plan based on five pie-shaped magnet zones was turned down by the Court because no fixed racial enrollment quotas were established and no guarantees of "significant desegregation" were made. In Pittsburgh the State Human Relations Commission rejected a magnet school plan because it did not accomplish enough student movement to affect segregation significantly. Courts in Detroit, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and other cities have turned down similar magnet plans.

Court Orders Imposing Magnets

In Boston a team of court-appointed experts also proposed an extensive series of voluntary citywide schools based solely on educational excellence and voluntary student enrollment. The plan was rejected by Federal District Judge Garrity as legally unworkable: It was undependable, it would show results slowly if at all, it did not guarantee an end to desegregation. Instead of totally rejecting the plan, however, Judge Garrity added the legal requirements onto the educational merits of the plan and incorporated 22 magnet schools into his order. Admittedly, the magnet schools he proposed were created under less than ideal conditions: They were created instantly, no staff training or parent information sessions were conducted, and no special curriculum development to enhance the magnet themes was possible. In return, though, they became effective tools for desegregation and were upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Other federal and state courts have imposed similar legal constraints on the educational dimension of magnet schools. Nevertheless, the resulting hybrid of "mandatory voluntary schools" has often been successful. In Dallas, Federal Judge William Taylor divided the city into six subdistricts, in five of which racial percentages were similar

to those of the total system. Each of the five subdistricts offered a series of magnet elementary and middle schools and early childhood education centers (Kindergarten through third grade) with enrollments that matched the overall district racial percentages. Several citywide magnet schools were also established. Dallas views these efforts as educational improvements that have been facilitated by the court order. In fact, they represent modest educational improvements made possible by the legal and public pressure brought to bear by the minority community.

In Milwaukee a similar pattern developed. In the early 1970s the school board began to develop a series of specialty schools, including schools for talented and gifted, schools for creative arts, a multilanguage magnet, and a fundamental school. The school board was mindful of the emerging issues of desegregation, and when a 1976 federal district court order requiring systemwide desegregation was handed down, the school attached racial enrollment quotas to the schools, encouraged selective recruiting to increase racial balance, and opened the schools to suburban students.

In San Diego, where a state court ruled the school system in violation of the state racial balance statutes, 24 schools have been designated magnet schools. The court has accepted a somewhat less stringent enrollment quota system, although several of the schools have shown significant enrollment shifts, particularly when outside resources such as a university are involved. Other schools have not become noticeably more balanced, and it remains to be seen how the court will deal with this problem in future years.

In still other cases, courts have allowed a few so-called magnet schools to remain even though their student body is predominantly black. In Omaha, for example, one magnet high school with a vocational theme began with a 96% black enrollment. The primary intent of establishing the school was to entice white students to attend the school. As a result, outstanding equipment and resources have been made available. The school has had some success in recruiting whites, and the initial objective of a 50% white enrollment, in the opinion of some school department personnel, is not totally out of reach. A similar situation, with a number of predominantly black magnet schools, has also existed for several years in Atlanta.

Magnets and the Threat of a Court Order

A second group of school systems has developed extensive magnet school offerings in response to community pressures, but without direct involvement of a state or federal court. Seattle and Cincinnati are two outstanding examples of communities where school officials have campaigned actively for a program of voluntary integration based on magnet options. The fact that these school systems have been engaged in actual and potential legal battles with minority parents over desegregation should not detract from the leadership they are providing.

Seattle, in a citywide effort to integrate and enrich the schools, invested an enormous amount of staff time, money, and resources in the mid-1970s to develop a series of Kindergarten through twelfth grade magnet schools and programs. Planners were careful to equalize the burden of transportation on black and white students, to design programs that would appeal to all students (not just white students who might be contemplating leaving the system), and to put teeth into efforts to balance racial enrollment. The Seattle School Board, in fact, joined the NAACP in successfully challenging a statewide referendum that prohibited any form of busing to achieve racial balance.

In Cincinnati 14 different magnet options have been developed, including elementary programs with French, Spanish, or German bilingual specializations, a fundamental academy, an academy of math and science, and other programs. The magnet options were developed by a creative school leadership team, with widespread input from parents and community groups. The programs have been attractive to parents, though they affect a small percentage of the students in the system and the overall impact on racial balance has been limited. Nevertheless, Cincinnati officials hope that the success of these good faith attempts at voluntary desegregation will have an ameliorative effect on the federal desegregation suit still in progress in Cincinnati in early 1980. It has been lingering for five years and may not be fully settled for several more.

School-Initiated Magnets

A small number of school systems have initiated magnet program-

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ming in the absence of a court order or the threat of a court order simply for the benefits of multicultural learning. Many of these programs were developed in alternative schools, and racially balanced student enrollments have been voluntarily maintained. The Cambridge (Massachusetts) Alternative Public School is a good example. Created in the late 1960s by a determined group of predominantly white parents who wanted an open education for their children, the school has developed a consistent racial enrollment pattern of about 35% black, 50% white, and 15% other minorities. It considers itself a magnet school in every sense, since it contributes to school integration, is purely voluntary, and is uniquely attractive to a wide variety of students and their parents. The school in recent years has even been concerned with attracting a mix of pupils from different economic as well as racial backgrounds.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, a set of magnet programs was instituted in the early 1970s in the absence of a court order, although with some urging from the State Board of Education. Unlike many full-time magnet schools, St. Paul's magnet offerings are part-time, and each is educationally unique, offered only at the magnet site. Curricular specializations include career development, aesthetic environments, environmental inquiry, and social environment. In 1975-76 the St. Paul system voluntarily introduced a single full-time magnet, the Webster School, with strong parent backing. Relying on a magnet theme that emphasized both the basics and creative programming, the school's white enrollment has grown from 54% in 1975-76 to about 70% in 1979-80, despite the fact that the school is located in an identifiably minority neighborhood.

To date these voluntary programs—part-time "learning centers" that attract students from different schools for a series of half-day sessions and one full-time school—have been successful in preventing any serious outcry about unequal educational opportunity from St. Paul's minorities, who number less than 20% of the overall school population. In this respect St. Paul is one of the few examples of a school system that has used magnets to avoid a court fight. In the event of a desegregation finding against St. Paul, however, it is not likely that these voluntary options would be a sufficient remedy, although they

clearly indicate a good faith effort to counter the effects of racial isolation.

General Issues

The magnet school concept as a remedy for segregation raises several issues of both a legal and an educational nature.

1. *Are magnet schools by themselves effective as segregation remedies?*

The preponderance of evidence suggests that the answer is no. In the context of a larger desegregation plan, or used in conjunction with other techniques such as redistricting, pairing of schools, and school consolidation, magnet schools can have positive desegregation benefits. In large cities with extremely large minority populations and ethnically distinct neighborhoods, magnets have not had a major impact on segregation. Seattle is a case in point. After several years of diligent attempts to desegregate voluntarily through the magnet programs described earlier, the Seattle School Board felt it necessary to adopt a more stringent desegregation plan in 1978-79. This plan featured mandatory reassignments and pairing of schools in minority and majority neighborhoods, as well as some magnet offerings. Seattle took this action in the absence of a court order, although there was some pressure from the minority community.

In smaller cities, with perhaps one imbalanced school, magnets can be effective. In Worcester, Massachusetts, for example, one heavily Hispanic school has been paired in a series of part-time magnet programs with surrounding white schools. This has led recently to proposals for a full-time magnet school serving white and Hispanic students. Even in a case such as this, however, strong public leadership from local school and political leaders is usually necessary to support the implementation of the magnet school.

2. *Do magnet schools serve the plaintiff class or the white middle class?*

Legally, this is a critical issue. The plaintiff class (NAACP, black parents and students) has been aggrieved and a legal remedy must be sought *for them*. In the majority of urban school systems employing magnet options in recent years, the percentage of white student enroll-

ment has dropped significantly for a variety of reasons. Often, the hope of magnet school planners is that the new and exciting magnet offerings will attract white students *back* to the public schools. This can result in magnet schools that cater to white middle-class students. As Michael Alves, state desegregation planner in Massachusetts, has written: "Magnets skewed on the basis of social and economic class will invariably structure a learning environment for those which it desires most to attract." If magnets are to prove their worth as desegregation remedies, they must demonstrate, first and foremost, an ability to educate the minority children and poor children whose rights previously have been denied.

3. *Does the existence of special magnet schools inevitably result in second-class nonmagnet schools?*

The issue of equity between magnet and nonmagnet schools has two aspects. First, do racially balanced magnets result in imbalanced nonmagnets? In Cambridge, Massachusetts, for example, it was recently found that the attendance of nearly half the students in the successful magnet school resulted in greater imbalance in the nonmagnet sending schools. In other words, minority students were allowed to leave white majority schools and white students were allowed to leave black majority schools to attend the magnet school. This resulted in an ideally integrated magnet school and increasingly segregated sending schools. The impact on nonmagnet sending schools is a critical factor to consider in magnet planning.

The second aspect of equity involves the potential denial of rights to parents who are unable to get their children into magnet schools. Since magnets may not have admission criteria that discriminate against one or another racial group, all parents should have an equal right to a magnet education for their child. If the quality of instruction, level of services, funds for supplementary curricular materials, and other services tend to be higher in magnet schools, as they have clearly been shown to be in several cities, it is not implausible to imagine an equity complaint being filed by parents from a nonmagnet school. This group would probably be minority parents, simply because the percentage of white students is diminishing in most urban school systems and the few available white students would be allowed to enroll in

the magnets to create racial balance. "We don't have enough white kids to go around," a St. Louis official has been quoted as saying. "How are you going to integrate a school district that is only 23% white?"

Some people would argue that those white students should be spread around equally in all the schools, just as minority students have been spread around in other desegregation sites. The white majority in St. Louis, however, has argued that the 23% white students should be concentrated in a smaller number of schools where the enrollment would be closer to 50% white and 50% black. This raises, again, the issue of serving the plaintiff class. When desegregation in terms of numerical balance becomes no longer possible, what is the responsibility of the school system?

In a recent court appeal in Dallas, this issue has been taken to its logical conclusion. The 1976 Dallas court order excluded one predominantly black section of the city from the racial balancing requirements imposed on the rest of the city. Into this district the school department poured massive remedial and supportive services. In 1978 the plaintiffs, arguing on appeal that the district should not have been excluded from the original order, won a higher court ruling that allowed for a review of the issue. The Dallas Independent School District, in turn, submitted evidence in court purporting to demonstrate that minority students attending schools in the all-black section of the city had *higher* achievement scores than minority students in integrated schools. School officials attributed this to the extra funds and remediation efforts that were put into the predominantly black schools. The issue has not been resolved and may not be for several years. However, this case raises a fundamental question: Despite the loss of white students in many urban areas, are educational improvements sufficient to meet the needs of the plaintiff class? Or, as we shall discuss later in the section called Metropolitan Magnet Options, are white students drawn from the suburbs and from private and parochial schools necessary to achieve school desegregation?

4. *Do enrollment quotas undermine the voluntary nature of magnet schools?*

Magnet schools are not alternative schools that just happen to be racially balanced. Magnet schools must have strict racial enrollment

quotas, and they must be monitored closely. This, of course, runs counter to the notion that magnets are open to everyone and are purely voluntary. In fact, magnet schools that are located in white neighborhoods seldom have difficulty attracting whites, but they often have difficulty attracting minority students. Magnets in black neighborhoods very often have difficulty attracting whites, but seldom have problems with black enrollment. The neighborhood is usually a more powerful draw than the magnet school. The success of a magnet, then, very often rests on the willingness of the school board to say no to children, white or black, who want to go to the neighborhood magnet school. If, say, half the seats in a school are reserved for children of a different race living in other neighborhoods, this means that half the neighborhood children will have to go elsewhere. Sometimes this problem can be ameliorated by locating magnets in buildings that are underutilized or due for consolidation. Also, good public communication can soften the resistance. But for some parents no amount of explanation is going to erase feelings of being treated unjustly, and a clash between those parents and school officials will inevitably result. School officials who bend the rules to accommodate neighborhood parents and who refuse to enforce strict enrollment quotas will end up with racially imbalanced magnets. If the enrollment quotas are publicly known or are part of a court order, failure to enforce them will provide evidence that can be used by plaintiffs in legal challenges to achieve more complete desegregation.

The issue of the voluntariness of magnet schools cuts the other way in school systems under court order. In many cases, parents are given one of two choices: either choose a citywide magnet or have children forcibly assigned to a redistricted and usually unknown local school. The existence of a systemwide desegregation order, in other words, limits the parents' choice. It is a choice between a voluntarily integrated magnet or a forcibly integrated local school, not between a voluntarily integrated magnet and a neighborhood school. The fact that a parent can exercise some degree of control over the child's education by choosing a magnet school, regardless of its program appeal, has been shown to be a strong factor contributing to the school's success.

Magnet Schools: An Educational Perspective

In many of the early battles for school desegregation, antibusing factions argued that "quality" education was more important than, as they put it, the "numbers game"—the strict numerical balancing of schools by race. Liberals and pro-integration parties took "quality" education in that context to be a code word for "segregated" education and pressed courts of law to desegregate school systems strictly according to the numbers. In recent years, however, even courts of law have come to see that numbers alone will not remedy the wrongs of segregation. Now people who talk about "quality integrated education" are asking the important question: What do kids find at the end of the bus ride?

A number of leading black educators have begun to return to the notion of quality education, regardless of racial mix. Derrick Bell, a professor at Harvard Law School, suggests that the underlying rationale of *Brown* v. *Board of Education* is inherently racist (black children can't learn unless they're in school with white children) and that the quality of education is the vital factor, not the degree to which the schools are racially balanced. This position approaches the old "separate but equal" notion in a curious way. Other liberal and pro-integration persons, though not as adamant as Bell, are also now beginning to question their long-standing commitment to large-scale, court-ordered busing programs.

Does the quality education issue, along with the increasing loss of white students from many urban school systems, suggest that the federal role in mandating school desegregation has somehow backfired or not lived up to expectations? This fastback does not purport to answer

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such questions. Nevertheless, the tremendous growth in interest in voluntary desegregation practices, i.e., magnet schools, signals widespread awareness as we move into the 1980s that racial balance alone is not sufficient to satisfy the demand of plaintiffs for quality integrated education. Magnet schools, because they are voluntary, *must* be quality schools, or at least they must appear that way to parents, and therein lies the novelty and strength of magnet education.

The educational aspects of magnet schools can be approached either supportively or cynically. The supportive position notes the great variety of new programs, improvements in staff morale, parent participation, and other factors as evidence of a new movement. Cynics argue that very few of the programs are more than surface deep, improvements in staff morale are shortlived or nonexistent, and that the magnet school movement is little more than a fad.

In my view there is some wisdom in both points of view, and the discussion of magnet schools in this section will include both the hard realities and the hopeful ideals. Testimony from around the country proves that magnet schools *can* serve as vehicles for educational improvement. On the other hand, as our desegregation review has shown, most magnets have emerged in response to judicial pressures to desegregate; the motives of magnet planners, then, are appropriately being questioned, as are claims that magnet education is a full-fledged "movement."

From an educational perspective, there are at least four critical areas that need to be considered: 1) staff commitment and morale, 2) program design, 3) administrative support, and 4) parent participation.

Staff Commitment and Morale

Many magnet schools have the luxury of being able to employ faculty who have volunteered for the assignment. Staff people who have voluntarily transferred to a magnet school tend to be more responsive to program innovation, particularly at the elementary level. In Bridgeport, Connecticut, where two magnet elementary schools are being planned by faculty committees, the school that is being asked to rely solely on existing staff is undergoing some difficult philosoph-

ical conflicts over whether to present the new curriculum—designed to emphasize the mastery of basic skills—as an "innovative" curriculum or as a "traditional" curriculum. The teachers, with vested interests in continuing to teach "the only way they know how," are unsure which approach best serves their interest.

At the secondary level, where curricular specialization is more likely to occur, the issue is often more complex. At the Mario Umana School of Science and Technology in Boston, the wholely volunteer faculty, though initially enthusiastic, was in general disappointed by the low science aptitudes of many of the students. The faculty pushed, unsuccessfully, to establish admission criteria for students, but it has had to settle for expanded remedial services, many of which are provided through the college "pairing" with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.). (See Hunt, McMillan, and Worth.)

Data gathered in a U.S. Office of Education study of magnet schools tends to confirm this elementary/secondary variation. The quality of staff is found to be of major importance to parents and school staff in making magnet elementary schools attractive; in high schools, quality of staff is ranked next to last in importance among eight variables studied. The rank ordering of factors that contribute to magnet school appeal are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Factors That Attract Parents and Students to Magnet Schools

Elementary	*Secondary*
1. Program	1. Program
2. Faculty	2. Voluntary nature of magnet
3. Voluntary nature of magnet	3. Alternative nature of magnet
4. Alternative nature of magnet	4. School location
5. Parent involvement	5. Principal
6. Facilities	6. Facilities
7. Principal	7. Faculty
8. School location	8. Parent involvement

(Source: Abt Associates Report on ESAA Magnet Schools, p. 85.)

In schools where existing staff people are asked to continue on in newly created magnet schools, the staff reaction is often surprisingly supportive. At the Mark Twain Junior High School in Brooklyn, the regular faculty continued and the school became a successful magnet school for talented and gifted students. The enthusiasm of teachers and administrators in building a new focus for the old curriculum was very high. We have seen already how a handful of dedicated staff members in the King Middle School in Boston were able to respond to the challenge of the federal court and build an attractive magnet school under very difficult circumstances. In Dallas the enthusiasm of new magnet faculty, at least in the first years of the Dallas plan, played a major role in designing new curricula almost overnight.

There is wide variation in the degree to which magnet staff, whether voluntary or assigned, are given retraining to orient them to the new magnet curricula. Where school systems have adopted magnets willingly, the emphasis on staff training is usually high. Portland, Racine, Pittsburgh, and Montclair are good examples. In systems where magnets are imposed, the degree of training activities varies widely. In Boston, for example, there was literally none. In Dallas, San Diego, and elsewhere, significant staff development took place.

The most critical need for the staff appears to be training in interracial teaching. As Kimbrough Marshall of the King School in Boston has noted:

> There is perhaps no teaching challenge greater than dealing with a class containing a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, and after years of dealing with tracked, more homogeneous classes, the King staff was unprepared.

As Elizabeth Cohen and others have discovered, there are significant barriers to positive interracial interactions in schools, and trained staff people are far more likely to create a climate conducive to interracial learning and cooperation. Other studies have demonstrated that different classroom organization patterns can have a beneficial effect on student interaction. (See, for example, Schofield and Sager; Thomas and McMillan.) There is no evidence, however, to indicate that magnet school staffs are accomplishing the goals of interracial teaching any

better than staffs in forcibly desegregated or naturally integrated schools. For all schools, however, the goals are critical.

There is an added factor in magnets that can have a significant impact on staff morale. Unlike most aspects of public education, magnet schools suggest the notion of competition: competition for students, and in turn, competition for staff positions. The declining enrollment occurring in most parts of the country is making the competition even more intense.

In many cases, magnets that do not meet their enrollment projections will lose staff positions and eventually close. Principals and teachers who work in magnet schools are not often made to feel accountable for the number of students enrolling, but central school officials can encourage greater staff performance by setting some class enrollment goals. The work of the King School faculty, as we have seen, was outstanding in this regard. Union grievances are no doubt more likely to occur in such a situation. Overall, however, the motivational aspect seems to have great potential for improving staff morale in magnet schools.

Program Design

Table 1 indicates that the program is the feature that attracts parents and students to magnet schools. Studies conducted for the Massachusetts Department of Education have documented a similar pattern, with program and staff important at the elementary level and program and curriculum important at the secondary level. These findings are central to the argument that magnet education is improving the quality of education. The program, supporters argue, is the factor that attracts the racially mixed student body voluntarily and, hence, forms the heart of magnet education appeal.

Critics have contended, on the other hand, that the program that attracts students to magnet schools is the same kind that attracts parents and students to any school, that is, a *good* program. To insure magnet school success, they argue, simply designate a few schools with outstanding reputations as magnet schools and open up the attendance zones. This creates "successful" magnet schools but can significantly undermine the status and, indirectly, the quality of nonmagnet

schools. The system ends up, therefore, with a dual track: a set of good magnet schools and a set of inferior nonmagnet schools.

Theoretically, there are two ways to handle this dilemma, though neither appears to be working very well. One solution is to establish distinctive magnet schools that are attractive because they are different or unique, not because they are better. There is widespread evidence that this is not happening, however. The U.S. Office of Education and Massachusetts studies referred to earlier, as well as numerous testimonies in the professional literature, conclude that "uniqueness" is not a significant factor of magnet schools. Of the magnet schools studied, about half are not unique or different in any significant way from nonmagnet schools in the district; for the other half, the uniqueness of the program does not appear to contribute much to the attractiveness or effectiveness of the school.

The second possible solution to the problem of superior magnet schools and inferior nonmagnet schools is the obvious one: Make *all* schools magnet schools. This was proposed in 1978 in Indianapolis, where parents of all elementary school students were given a choice of six options, but only 22% of the parents expressed an interest in the magnet options. The federal district court offered general approval of the concept but threw the plan out because children could not be bused around the city until a pending desegregation suit had been resolved. The school system responded by offering the six options on a pilot basis in selected sites during the 1978-79 school year. As of this writing, the desegregation case has not been resolved. It remains to be seen whether any other city will pick up this notion of making all of its schools magnet schools and whether they will be sufficiently attractive to parents to transcend neighborhood boundaries. At present this seems unlikely. Studies have suggested that the number of parents in any system who opt for "alternative" learning will never go much above 20%. The rest want good old-fashioned basic schools.

The present state of affairs, in other words, supports the notion that successful magnet schools tend to be good schools, in very conventional terms. What becomes, then, of the multitude of fancy new curricular models at the elementary and secondary levels, the most prevalent of which are listed in Table 2?

TABLE 2
Most Prevalent Magnet Curricular Themes

Elementary	*Secondary*
1. Open nontraditional	1. Visual/performing arts
2. Fundamental, traditional	2. Science/math/technology
3. Language/humanities/ multicultural	3. Careers/vocational
4. Talented and gifted	4. Academic/honors
	5. Language/humanities

Magnet schools in some cities, like Montclair, New Jersey, and Buffalo, New York, have well-developed magnet themes that, to some degree, are distinctive. Some elementary magnet schools in Milwaukee and Minneapolis have a distinctive teaching style that is somewhat distinguishable from nonmagnet schools in the district. On the other hand, the distinctiveness of an elementary school with a special curricular theme, like science or language, must surely be questioned. If science is stressed, what is reduced? Is it educationally feasible to track students by specialties at the elementary level? Providing elementary magnet schools in magnificent new facilities that purport to have a multicultural magnet theme but offer the same basic skills curriculum as all the other city elementary schools is a very shallow form of educational marketing. Similarly, a secondary magnet program in creative arts that offers one more hour of dance instruction per week than do the other public schools can scarcely be called distinctive.

If we dispense with the notion of distinctiveness, however, we come closer to understanding the programmatic contributions that magnet schools appear to be making. The new curricular designs, however shallow they may be, seem to result in highly attractive and well-attended schools. These schools, in the eyes of parents and students, are distinguished in terms of excellence, if not uniqueness. So what is wrong with the creation of excellent schools? The equity issue (good magnets vs. poor nonmagnets) is important, but, as it turns out, it may not be critical. Demands from parents of students in nonmagnet schools have *not* been increasing to any noticeable degree in recent years, even in cities where magnets have existed for more than five

years. So long as certain external measures are kept equal (e.g., per-pupil expenditures, extracurricular programs), parents of nonmagnet school students do not appear to view their schools as inferior in any significant respect, probably because of the proximity of the nonmagnet school or because of lack of interest in the magnet theme.

As we have seen, the racial enrollments of magnet schools are almost always controlled by factors external to the school—state legislatures, federal court orders, the Office of Civil Rights, school boards. However, educational improvements, solely within the purview of school faculty, parents, and (often) students, are proceeding rapidly in magnet schools, usually for no other reason than the novelty and challenge they offer. The educational improvements are usually not strikingly new or innovative. But the staff's willingness to build a program around a theme or special purpose can create a new sense of commitment, enrich many aspects of teacher/learner interaction, and contribute to a greater sense of satisfaction among parents and students.

This, in my view, is the essence of magnet education. In one respect, it is a warmed-over version of the alternative schools movement. Unlike alternative schools, however, magnet schools have an external motivating factor that will not recede from the federal landscape for decades to come: school desegregation. The motivation for alternative schools was only the transitory unrest of the 1960s, which has now passed. The usefulness of magnet schools as desegregation remedies is, as we have seen, marginal. We know this because many of the larger cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Philadelphia have supported magnet schools for several years as desegregation tools, but in the absence of strict court monitoring, integration has not been achieved. But other large cities, as well as many mid-sized cities whose changing demographics will make them the desegregation sites of the 1980s and 1990s, will have to deal with court-ordered desegregation plans that, barring another Supreme Court flip-flop, will inevitably include some forced busing. And magnet schools (alternative schools with racial enrollment quotas or excellent schools that accept children on a citywide, voluntary basis) will, I predict, continue to appeal to a broad spectrum of clients. This will surely include the predominantly white antibusing

contingent, but it will also enlist the support of minority and majority parents who care less about the racial make-up of the classroom than they do the quality of instruction. This need to find more socially acceptable solutions to the intractable social problem of school desegregation will continue long after the need for alternative schools.

Administrative Support

Three aspects of administrative support related to the success of magnet schools are: funding; communication with civic, business, cultural, and higher education institutions; and openness of communication.

Effective implementation of magnet schools will require funding for staff development, for program support, for involvement of external institutions, and for parent involvement. Different school systems have handled this in different ways, some successfully, some not. In Dallas and Houston, for example, enormous public tax levies and corporate contributions brought in millions of extra dollars for desegregation and implementation of magnet schools. In Milwaukee, Chicago, and Springfield (Massachusetts) state funds are available for local magnet planning. In Buffalo, Dayton, and Montclair large federal grants have been awarded under the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA). The willingness of administrators to go after funds from several sources is often a good indicator of their level of support.

The more successful the fund raising, however, the more likely it becomes that nonmagnet school staff and parents will complain. This has occurred in Boston where a white mother alleged unequal treatment because her sons attended the "control" school while other "experimental" schools received funds to upgrade student skills; Federal District Judge Garrity dismissed the complaint. If the documented expenditure for magnet schools consistently exceeds that for nonmagnets, challenges from the "disadvantaged" nonmagnet schools are inevitable. Allocating more money for new initiatives in the early years of a magnet school, then, must give way within a very few years to equity in per-pupil expenditure. If extra funds continue to be needed, they must show up as supplementary or temporary, not regular school expenditures. To the extent that magnet schools require special

funds, this bodes ill for their long-term future. As with alternative schools, good magnet schools must find ways to be special without being more expensive.

The involvement of outside agencies in magnet school development has been effective in many cities. To build these outside institutional relationships, strong central administrative support or a strong court order is a virtual necessity. Most desegregation court orders since the Denver case have included some provisions for support from higher education, business, and/or cultural groups. The actual work of initiating new programs usually takes place at the school building level, but strong central administration sanction is usually necessary to make it last. The same potential for jealous reaction from nonmagnets exists here, and central administrators must be careful to spread the institutional support to all schools.

Finally, central administrators must be open and forthright about the ground rules for magnet school education. Failure to deal with staff about issues of enrollment decline, possible loss of teaching positions, relative benefits of being in magnets or nonmagnets, and teaching expectations has undermined magnet planning in many cities. Dealing openly with parents about enrollment quotas, transportation, and new curricular offerings is also essential.

Parent Participation

In general, the level of parent participation in magnet schools has been very high, regardless of whether they are fully voluntary or quasi-voluntary. Research at the federal and state levels indicates that magnet schools do provide increased opportunities for parental control over educational issues. This is a key finding and bodes well for the future of magnets as vehicles of educational improvement. Parental involvement in public education has always been an important goal of educators. Efforts to increase parental involvement in and support for magnet schools can only be beneficial.

A cynical view of parental involvement brings up the equity issue again. Critics charge that the more motivated and better educated parents tend to send their students to magnet schools; hence, their level of involvement is higher because their expectations are higher, not be-

cause the school operates any differently. Magnet schools, in other words, attract a self-selected elite that robs other schools of their talented students and aggressive parents. There is very little published research to confirm or deny this charge. Cincinnati, to get at this issue, conducted an analysis of achievement scores for students before they enrolled at a magnet school. If all the bright students were going to magnet schools, as some observers were alleging, the school system wanted to know. The facts did not support the charge; the pre-enrollment differences between magnet and nonmagnet students were negligible. As part of the larger issue of equity, however, the issue of elitism will require more research of this kind before it is laid to rest.

State and Federal Roles

State legislatures and state boards of education have been notoriously derelict in enforcing federal desegregation standards. From 1957, when Arkansas Governor Orvil Faubus attempted to keep North Little Rock High School segregated, to the present, when a host of states are being included as defendants in desegregation suits, state governments have been more likely to use their bureaucratic wiles to restrict rather than support desegregation.

There are notable exceptions. Massachusetts, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and California have been enforcing state and federal desegregation standards. These five states have played a major role in supporting a national initiative on desegregation strategies through the Education Commission of the States in Denver. This group recently published a position paper on the state role in desegregation calling for state-level desegregation legislation, state guidelines for multicultural education, state standards for desegregation, and state financial incentives for magnet schools and other desegregation techniques.

Nowhere is this range of state services better exemplified than in Massachusetts, where state support for magnet schools is foremost in the nation. The state legislature has appropriated $3 million annually since 1975 to support magnet schools and part-time magnet programs and to provide technical assistance and monitoring personnel. Magnet options are now available in no fewer than 30 cities in Massachusetts. The strong leadership of the state commissioner of education and the state Board of Education has been exemplary.

A more typical state is Ohio, which is being pressured into playing a more active role in desegregation issues. In the winter of 1979, school boards in Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Akron, and Youngstown were defendants in federal school desegregation litigation. Also, Springfield, Canton, Toledo, Princeton, and Lima have been targets for investigation by the Office of Civil Rights. A dozen other Ohio communities are struggling with desegregation plans to prevent future court or Office of Civil Rights action. All of these communities have begun to explore magnet school options in one form or another. The state legislature impaneled a Joint Select Committee on School Desegregation that, among other recommendations, argued for further development of magnet schools and voluntary options for desegregating systems. State staff and resources are now being allocated to implement the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee.

Other states, especially Northern and Western states like Pennsylvania, Indiana, Delaware, Rhode Island, Washington, Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, are being brought into the desegregation arena in much the same way as Ohio. Federal desegregation suits make continued inaction impossible.

In contrast to the state role, the federal presence in school desegregation and particularly in magnet school education has been substantial. The Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) provides financial support for school systems that are in the process of desegregating under a federal court order. In 1976 amendments to ESAA allowed funding of magnet schools. Since that time the appropriation has risen from $10 million in fiscal year 1977 to $42 million in fiscal year 1980. The enormous amount of money available for magnet schools has sometimes been underutilized or misused. Many ESAA magnet school proposals have been funded that have had little or no impact on reducing racial segregation. In many cases the high educational quality of the proposals submitted has been more impressive than their desegregation impact. It would be unfair, perhaps, to cite this as an example of federal overreaction and overspending to solve a problem that is beyond the reach of federal dollars, but there is more than a kernel of truth in that charge. When Ohio Senator John Glenn introduced the magnet school amendments to ESAA, he spoke of an end to forced busing and

the civil strife that was being seen regularly on evening news broadcasts out of Boston, Louisville, Chicago, and elsewhere. The argument that magnets were a relatively simple solution to a complex social problem was persuasive. With little other recourse, the federal financial commitment grew by leaps and bounds.

A national study of the ESAA magnet school efforts completed in February 1979 (Abt Associates) calls for serious reassessment of magnet schools as a segregation remedy. Recommendations include:

1. Federal funding should not be increased.
2. The Office of Education should "clarify its objectives" regarding magnets.
3. Systems where magnet schools are one part of an overall desegregation plan should be given preference over "magnet only" plans.
4. The ESAA magnet program should stress its *desegregation* intent rather than its *educational improvement* intent.

The first three recommendations suggest that the federal government should cool down its enthusiasm for magnet schools. There is ample evidence to support this caveat. The last recommendation, however, is most provocative. As I have argued, magnet schools have not proven themselves to be effective desegregation tools unless they are part of a broader enforcement plan such as a comprehensive court order. Nevertheless, the strength and vitality of magnet schools lies in their ability to excite staff and encourage innovation and educational excellence. The fourth ESAA study recommendation clearly suggests that ESAA staff people have, to some extent, reached this conclusion too. Whether ESAA proposal reviewers will continue to fund magnet school proposals that purport to provide substantial educational improvements but can only "promise" that increased desegregation will occur remains to be seen.

It is my view that, because of the fundamental involuntary nature of school desegregation, it is not something that local school systems will do willingly, no matter how much extra money can be produced for the system and no matter how many fancy innovations are introduced in the schools. School segregation outside the South is largely a function of residential and socioeconomic segregation, aided, to be sure, by unscrupulous politicians and demogogic school board mem-

bers. Forced school desegregation is a limited remedy to these larger problems; voluntary magnet schools are an even more limited remedy to the problem of school segregation. If the federal government recognizes this, it will no doubt accept the recommendation of the ESAA evaluation report and slow its support for magnets. Whether this will be politically feasible, given the still intense opposition to forced busing plans in many parts of the country, remains to be seen.

Metropolitan Magnet Options

In *Milliken* v. *Bradley*, the 1974 Detroit school desegregation case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that suburban districts could not be forcibly included in a metropolitan school desegregation plan unless it could be proven that the suburban districts and/or the state government participated intentionally in maintaining segregation within the inner city. This is a standard that plaintiffs have attempted to meet in a number of cities, successfully in Wilmington and Indianapolis but unsuccessfully in other cases.

Sociologists argue that there is such a preponderance of evidence that local, regional, state, and federal housing practices in the past 30 years have so thoroughly insured residential segregation between cities and suburbs that the standard laid down in *Milliken* v. *Bradley* should be easily achieved and that mandatory metropolitan desegregation ought to proceed apace (Pettigrew). The metropolitan configuration in many cities is, indeed, very similar on a larger scale to the center city configurations that gave rise to most of the desegregation suits in recent years. Plaintiffs make the following arguments:

1. Minorities are isolated in predominantly minority schools. At present, only five out of the 20 largest city school systems in the country have a majority of white students.

2. The quality of education, staffing, and curriculum, and the extent of financial support, are thought to be inferior in the minority schools.

3. Certain "state actions" are alleged to have caused both the segregation and the unequal facilities.

The suburban intent to segregate is not easy to prove in court, and many supporters of metropolitan desegregation have had to rely on largely voluntary approaches. These efforts have been few and far between, and there are at present only the vaguest indications of a trend toward voluntary metropolitan magnet school options. Without the force of law, voluntary metropolitan magnet schools have not developed to any noticeable extent. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin all have voluntary metropolitan transfer plans, where students from the city or suburbs may attend school in the other Local Education Authority (LEA) if the transfer reduces racial isolation or imbalance. Various financial incentives have been tied to these transfers. In other school systems, including Jacksonville, Tampa, Nashville, Charlotte, and other Southern cities, metropolitan transfers have been implemented but usually as part of a larger effort at school consolidation, reduction of costs, and, in some cases, racial balancing.

To date there has not been the same degree of excitement about metropolitan voluntary transfer plans as there is about urban magnet schools. This may be a reflection of the earlier stage in development for metropolitan approaches. Many of the early intracity transfer plans were voluntary, open-enrollment plans that were later judged by many courts to have been poorly implemented and manipulated by school officials. Factors of costs and travel time are surely involved, as are factors of political control. Nevertheless, the opportunities for voluntary metropolitan magnet schools, particularly if not exclusively at the secondary level, appear to be very significant.

Part-time urban-suburban exchanges have had some success, especially in Massachusetts. In 1973 the U.S. Office of Education awarded nearly $1 million to the Metropolitan Planning Project, a consortium of 78 LEAs in eastern Massachusetts, to study the feasibility of large-scale, voluntary metropolitan options. The voluminous research reports, regrettably, resulted in little federal follow-up, and the project has since been transformed into a small programmatic operation, supported mostly by state desegregation funds. The Metropolitan Planning Project and perhaps a dozen other agencies compete for state funds to bring together city and suburban children. Cultural agencies, dance studios, or outdoor facilities most often serve as "neutral" sites

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where the programs take place. The various projects have reached perhaps 15,000 youngsters since 1975. The programs in 1980, however, are very similar to the 1975 programs and are almost exclusively dependent on state funding. It does not appear that there has been much internal support of project goals by LEAs and the future of the project appears to be largely dependent on external funds. (McMillan)

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are several general statements about magnet schools that the literature and the testimony of practitioners appear to support:

1. Magnet schools and programs, by themselves, are not effective as desegregation tools. However, in conjunction with a court order or other mandated desegregation steps, magnets can be an effective desegregation measure.

2. Magnet schools will be around for a long time, perhaps as long as school segregation is viewed as a social and educational problem in our society.

3. Successful magnets appear to have a strong positive effect on the quality of education; most often, magnet schools are identifiably "good" schools; they are well attended, parent involvement is high, and dropout rates are low.

4. Successful magnet schools, however, can raise new problems of equity with nonmagnet school parents and students. Issues of equal access, equal resources, equal prestige, and elitism arise between magnet and nonmagnet schools.

5. While many magnets have distinctive and well-developed themes, too many magnet themes are narrow and superficial. The most substantial elementary themes are pedagogical (style of teaching); the most attractive secondary themes are content-oriented (arts, sciences, humanities, etc.).

Overall, then, we see a pattern that has both strengths and weaknesses. No doubt the cynic is still not convinced of the value of magnet schools. Magnets, he would argue, are gimmicks devised by whites to undermine the legacy of *Brown* v. *Board of Education*. The advo-

cate, on the other hand, hangs on to the notion that we can improve the quality of education *and* desegregate.

The evidence, as usual, doesn't justify either of the extreme positions. What may have begun as a gimmick for some has been demonstrated to work in many cities. At the same time, the limitations of magnet schools have also been well documented: The pull of the neighborhood school is still too strong, the range of truly distinctive options is still too limited, and the pressures from nonmagnet schools is growing. Still, it is my feeling that magnet education has proven itself and that its strengths should be exploited in the decades to come.

There are a few areas where more work needs to be done. First, better techniques of educational marketing should be explored. With compulsory attendance laws, public schools have never had to worry about getting clients; now, with declining enrollments, competition for students is increasing. Private and parochial schools are much more sophisticated in techniques of recruiting students. Furthermore, current proposals for tuition tax credits for parents of private school students and educational vouchers for parents that would allow them to purchase whatever form of education they wish for their children, if implemented, are clearly a threat to the future of public schools. Public schools, to compete, must learn to attract and sell. Magnet schools are one means to that end.

Second, the goal of improved interracial education, once the students are *inside* school buildings, needs serious attention. Integrated schools everywhere, whether voluntary or not, face the problems inherent in teaching students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Magnet schools are in a position to provide leadership in this area by identifying curricular and instructional approaches that increase interracial interaction and respect among students.

Third, it has been amply demonstrated that once a finding of unconstitutional segregation has been made by a court, magnet schools are usually not a sufficient remedy. Magnet schools should be developed before a court action is initiated. In most of America's large urban centers, courts are already involved in desegregation action. In smaller and mid-sized cities, the possibilities for voluntary desegregation are still substantial. Small-town politics and parochialism can create

obstacles as difficult to overcome as big-city bureaucracies, but the scope of the challenge is more manageable.

Finally, the search for alternative strategies for desegregation should go on. Even if there is an element of gimmickry in the notion of magnet schools, which I think there often is, and even if future research shows that the life span of effective magnet schools is no more than five years, they should not be dismissed as fraudulent or temporary. If they can help to improve staff morale, divert some of the acrimony of forced desegregation, and occasionally result in improved educational quality, they are significant. The research on forced desegregation, in terms of student achievement, satisfaction, parent support, social change, or other criteria, is not conclusively positive by any means. The problem of social and economic separation of the races is so immense and complex that there is no successful single approach or final solution. But magnet schools and programs, in the context of the safeguards and provisos outlined in this fastback, can play a small but significant part.

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